Bureaucrat, her husband indicted in bogus cheque case

LAHORE: A banking court has indicted a BPS-19 civil servant of the Finance Division and her husband in a case of furnishing a 'bogus' cheque to a private bank for the repayment of a house loan.

Both Sehar Mannoo, the deputy secretary, and her husband, Qadeer Ashfaq, pleaded not guilty and decided to contest the trial.

Banking Court-III Presiding Judge Muhammad Kashif read out the charge sheet to the accused persons during the last hearing on Jan 3. He directed the prosecution to present its evidence on Feb 3.

The judge also allowed an application of the accused bureaucrat for the appointment of a pleader to attend the trial proceedings on her behalf.

JS Bank Limited had filed a criminal complaint against Sehar and Qadeer under different sections of the Financial Institution (Recovery of Finances) Ordinance 2001 and the Code of Criminal Procedure 1898.

According to the bank's lawyer, the respondents/suspects obtained a loan of Rs90.5m for the construction of their house. The lawyer said the respondents failed to pay the loan as per the agreed plan and later submitted a guarantee cheque for repayment of the loan.

However, he said, the cheque, when presented before the bank, was returned dishonoured for insufficient balance. He argued that the respondents were liable to be prosecuted and punished under the law for their offence.

Previously, the court had issued bailable arrest warrants for the accused for not attending the hearings. — **Staff Reporter**

Motorways partially closed due to dense fog

By Our Staff Reporter

LAHORE: Dense fog continued to paralyse road traffic across large parts of Punjab on Tuesday, prompting authorities to close several key motorways.

According to a spokesperson for theNational Highway and Motorway PoliceCentral Region, the M-4 Motorway from Gojra to Abdul Hakeem and the M-11 Lahore-Sialkot Motorway were closed for all traffic due to severely reduced visibility around 8pm.

For heavy vehicles, additional closures were imposed on M-4 from Pindi Bhattian to Abdul Hakeem and M-5 from Rahim Yar Khan to Rohri, causing significant disruption in intercity transport and freight movement.

Amid these conditions, a tragic accident occurred on Nawan Kot Road in Layyah, where a loader rickshaw rammed into a parked truck due to poor visibility. The collision resulted in the death of 20-year-old Muhammad Shan, while three others sustained injuries. Rescue 1122 teams shifted the injured to THQ Hospital, Choubara, for medical treatment.

The fog-related hazards were part of a wider pattern of road emergencies reported across Punjab. The Emergency Services Department (Rescue 1122, Punjab) stated that it responded to 1,081 road traffic crashes in the province during the last 24 hours. These incidents claimed 24 lives and left 1,251 people injured.

Of the injured, 521 victims with serious injuries were taken to hospitals, while 730 individuals with minor injuries treated on the spot by Rescue 1122 medical teams.

Four die, as many injured in accident

TOBA TEK SINGH: Four persons died and as many others were injured when a mini-truck carrying animals turned over near M-4 interchange on the Jhang Road.

Rescue 1122 reported that it's ambulances shifted bodies of four deceased and all four injured to Toba DHQ Hospital.

The mini-truck was going from Layyah to Faisalabad, carrying around 50 sheep and goats when its driver lost control due to a loose tie rod and overturned near M-4 Interchange.

The deceased included Ijaz Hussain (35), Muhammad Murad (28), Ansar (30) and an unknown person.

The injured included Kashif (37), Nazir Ahmed (55), Ahsan Azam (24), Taqi Riaz (21) and an unidentifed person in his late 20s. **— Correspondent**

LAHORE: Workers cut logs with an electric saw in the Timber Market. — White Star

Stakeholders call for govt intervention after potato market crash

Punjab's farmers unable to recover even inputs cost; growers from potato belt may find it hard to regain confidence anytime soon

By Shafiq Butt

SAHIWAL: Punjab's potato-growing belt is heading towards a severe economic shock due to production surplus, stagnant domestic demand and shrunk exports, prompting the farmers and experts to call for urgent government intervention through subsidies and exports.

The potato belt of the province includes Sahiwal, Okara, Pakpattan, Kasur and adjoining districts where the stakeholders, including the farmers, say that market has crashed even before the complete arrival of the new crop. Wholesale prices of potato have fallen well below the production costs, forcing some farmers to plough their fields, destroying their crop to avoid further losses. Potatoes were sold at the rate of Rs20-25 per kg in three districts of Sahiwal division.

"Farmers in districts of Okara, Pakpattan, Sahiwal, Kasur, Khanewal and Vehari say they are facing massive losses as a 60kg bag of potato from the cold storage is selling for only Rs600-700 in the open market while its transportation cost is Rs400. Many farmers are unable to sell their produce from the cold storage and potato traders are reluctant to release their stocks from cold storage," says Khalid Mahmood Khokhar, the president of Pakistan Kisan Ittehad (PKI), while speaking to *Dawn*.

Highlighting the troubles of potato farmers, he says they had invested Rs270,000 to Rs300,000 per acre in potato cultivation but they are unable to recover even their input costs.

Potatoes being sold at Rs20–25 per kg in the market leaves the growers with losses of Rs235,000 to Rs250,000 per acre, Mr Khokhar says and adds that 2025 has been a devastating year for potato farmers.

Agricultural experts estimate that Pakistan's domestic potato demand stands at around 6.2 million tonnes annually while the current season's crop is expected to be double of that volume. Even by optimistic estimates, including exports of about 350,000 tonnes to Afghanistan (if border opens) and another 400,000 tonnes to other destinations, the surplus would only be temporarily absorbed, stabilising prices for a few weeks at best.

"The crisis fundamentally stems from overproduction and surplus supply," says Rashid Chaudhry, chief executive officer of Pind Sudhar, an organisation doing independent market analysis and research on potato. He adds that exports without government support are not commercially viable because potatoes are cheap globally, while Punjab's cost of production is comparatively high.

Mr Rashid says transport costs, storage losses and weak prices in regional markets mean that unsubsidised exports often operate while facing a loss. Last year's experience underscores the risk when Afghan markets remained open, investors bought potatoes from farmers and stored them in anticipation of export demand. Farmers received reasonable prices but traders suffered heavy losses when prices failed to recover.

This is confirmed by Ahmed Hasan, a large potato grower and cold storage operator, at Depalpur in district Okara.

"This year, such investors will likely stay away. Without them, all the surplus produce will also flood the domestic market," says another cold storage operator who is based in Sahiwal.

Ahmed Hasan adds that situation is further complicated by uncertainty over trade with Afghanistan, saying that open borders encourage speculative buying and storage, helping stabilise farmgate prices. However, this year, this factor also looks unlikely due to the closure of Afghan border.

Official figures show that acreage under potato cultivation this season went up by about 24pc compared to last year, driven by herd behaviour among the farmers, seeking returns from an input-intensive but high-output crop.

Production costs compound the problem. Independent estimates put per acre cultivation costs at over Rs300,000, significantly higher than official figures of Rs266,000. With farmgate prices falling to Rs10-15 per kg in some markets, growers are facing losses even before harvest expenses are recovered.

Khalid Mahmood Khokhar argues that the only viable short-term solution for the Punjab government is to procure potatoes directly from the farmers and export them with a targeted subsidy.

While such a programme would require several billion rupees, proponents say the foreign exchange earned would offset part of the cost and help reduce the trade deficit.

Independent researchers caution that subsidies alone are not a long-term fix. They demand expansion through food processing, value addition and dietary diversification, alongside better production planning. However, they warn that without immediate action, the damage this season could be irreversible.

Punjab Minister for Agriculture Ashiq Hussain Kirmani, speaking to *Dawn* by phone, confirms that following the closure of the Afghan border, the Punjab government had written two letters to the Federal Commerce Ministry and the Ministry of National Food Security, requesting opening of an alternative route in the first week of December. He claims that it was through the efforts of the Punjab government that the Iranian border was formally and officially opened for the first time, which provided immediate relief, allowing Punjab's crops to find a way to the market of Iran, if not in Afghanistan.

He admits that the Punjab government cannot make decision regarding Afghan trade on its own.

Regarding the ongoing negotiations with PKI leadership, the minister states that the PKI charter of demands has been thoroughly discussed and that various consultative groups have been formed to finalise recommendations for both federal and provincial governments.

"The Punjab government genuinely wants to help all kinds of stakeholders but most of PKI's demands fall in the jurisdictions of the federal government. That's why Rana Tanveer, Federal Minister for National Food Security and Research, has been taken on board."

The provincial minister stresses that the government is making every possible efforts to protect the interests of farmers.

A delegation of the PKI, led by Khokhar, met the agriculture minister to discuss the farmers' issues, including price crisis of potatoes.

The minister noted that surplus production would often depress prices. He said that though the Afghan border remains closed, the federal government has managed exports to the Central Asian states via Iran, and assured full coordination to reduce farmers' losses and boost exports.On the occasion, PKI submitted a Charter of Demands, including declaration of an agriculture emergency, government of procurement and export of potatoes, restoration of solar net-metering, advance announcement of support prices, electricity at Rs15 per unit for tubewells, incentives for cotton cultivation, a crop insurance system, wheat support price of Rs4,000 per 40 kg and establishment of an independent price commission.

Pre-arrest bail of content creators extended

Licence of Rajab's lawyer restored

By Our Staff Reporter

LAHORE: A sessions court on Tuesday extended the pre-arrest bail of content creators Rajab Butt and Nadeem Mubarak alias Nani Wala in a case pertaining to the promotion of gambling apps on social media.

Strict security arrangements were made by the police when the two reached the court along with their lawyers.

Additional District and Sessions Judge Mansoor Ahmed Qureshi presided over the hearing, during which the counsel for the National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency (NCCIA) stated that the investigating officer was busy in proceedings before the Lahore High Court (LHC).

Therefore, the NCCIA counsel asked the court to allow time for producing the record.

Subsequently, Judge Qureshi extended the bail of both TikTokers till Jan 26 and directed the NCCIA to present the record at the next hearing.

The judge had earlier allowed Butt and Mubarak to leave the courtroom after marking their attendance.

In September 2025, the NCCIA booked the content creators for allegedly promoting online gambling apps on their social media accounts.

LICENCE: The Punjab Bar Council (PbBC) on Tuesday restored the practising licence of Advocate Mian Ali Ashfaq, the counsel representing Butt.

Earlier, Lahore High Court's Justice Malik Awais Khalid instructed the PbBC vice chairman to afford the lawyer an opportunity of personal hearing and decide the matter by 2pm.

The judge was hearing a petition of Advocate Mian Ashfaq against the suspension of his licence for representing TikToker Rajab Butt before a Karachi court despite a strike called by the local bar.

Later, the lawyer along with his counsel Shazib Masud appeared before the council's vice chairman to plead an objection petition.

PbBC Vice Chairman Ashfaq Kahoot turned down their argument against the authority of the executive committee to suspend the licence. However, he admitted their argument regarding violation of Article 10-A of the Constitution, which ensures a right to fair trial, in the issuance of the impugned order by the committee.

In his order, the vice chairman restored the licence of Advocate Mian Ali Ashfaq and referred the matter to the disciplinary committee of the council for further proceedings.

Later, Justice Khalid disposed of the lawyer's petition in light of the bar's decision.

The Jan 1 order passed by the PbBC executive committee said the licence of the lawyer was suspended on a complaint from the president and general secretary of the Karachi Bar Association.

The strike had been called in protest against the alleged victimisation of the Karachi Bar Association's former librarian, Naseer Muhammad Kalhoro.

Free emergency mobile phone charging facility

LAHORE: The Punjab Safe Cities Authority (PSCA) on Tuesday launched an emergency free mobile phone charging service in the city for public convenience and safety.

According to a PSCA spokesperson, the initiative offers four integrated public safety facilities at a single location in key areas of the city. These include Emergency Free Mobile Phone Charging, Panic Buttons, Free Wi-Fi and surveillance through 'Safety Zones'.

The purpose of this initiative is to ensure immediate assistance during emergencies and further improve public safety infrastructure, he adds.

The spokesperson says that in the initial phase, emergency free mobile phone charging ports have been activated at 30 important locations in Lahore. The facility will be expanded in phases, with a plan to extend the service to 100 locations in the near future.

He says the site selection has been carried out, keeping in view public needs, convenience and high-footfall areas. — **Staff Reporter**

Police expand scope of probe into suicide bid by varsity student

Investigators record statements of family

By Imran Gabol

LAHORE: Police have expanded the scope of investigation into the case of a female student's attempted suicide at a private university, following an earlier similar incident involving a male student.

The University of Lahore constituted a 'high-level' inquiry committee comprising senior faculty members and the management officers hours after a D. Pharmacy student attempted suicide by jumping from the second floor of the varsity building on Monday.

Fatima (21) was rushed to a local hospital with her both legs fractured badly and injuries to her other body parts. The police inquiries so far suggested that she took the extreme step following the pressure of her family to continue her studies in D. Pharmacy while she found it a tough subject. There were also reports that the student and her family had an heated argument on the same issue on Saturday last when she again raised the matter.

According to police officials, the student's family has so far not submitted any application seeking legal action. Her statement could not be recorded due to the severity of her injuries.

Police said the student sustained serious injuries to her spine and lungs after jumping from the university building. All required medical tests have been repeated and investigators have also received information from her family.

Police have taken custody of CCTV footage from all cameras installed inside and around the university to establish the full sequence of events, which is currently being reviewed.

Police sources said action would be taken against the university administration if any negligence or lapse is established during the investigation.

Investigators said the student remained on a phone call for 27 minutes before jumping and had deleted the record of her last call.

Initial findings suggested that she arrived at the university in the morning but did not attend her class. She was reportedly upset after receiving 18 marks out of 35 in a test, a matter she had also discussed with her father and brother.

Police said further progress in the case would be made after recording the student's statement.

Meanwhile, the injured student remains under treatment at Lahore General Hospital (LGH). The hospital administration confirmed that she has suffered a head injury and fractures to her back and knee.

On Tuesday, Higher Education Department (HED) Secretary Ghulam Farid Kathia visited LGH and inquired after the student. Medical Superintendent Dr. Faryad Hussain briefed him on her medical condition.

During a media briefing, Ameeruddin Medical College Principal Prof. Farooq Afzal said the student's condition has improved but the next 48 hours are critical.A special medical board, headed by Prof. Jodat Saleem, has been formed comprising specialists from neurosurgery, surgery, orthopaedics, pulmonology and gynaecology.

Prof Jodat Saleem said the patient was in shock on arrival and had lost significant blood. Doctors administered two units of blood and successfully stabilised her condition.

He said the patient's response to treatment has improved and medical care is continuing.